“The Stalking” By Grant Morrison from Batman Official Annual 1986

Transcribed by https://www.reddit.com/user/the-x-button/

There are secret places under the city; closed-off

storm drains, obsolete subway tunnels, the cellars

of demolished buildings. Down in the dark where

nobody goes, there is a network, a maze of buried

galleries. Down in the dark a shadow is moving.

Listen! You can almost hear it's soft and steady

breathing. It has found something. Something very

special. The most secret place of all.

The woman with green eyes looked around. Her

walk through the darkness had taken the best part

of debris and waded through flooded lightless

tunnels. She had walked sure-footedly in places

where the sun had never shone, until at last,

shimmying her slim body through the crack in the rock,

she had come upon the cavern. The eye slits in her mask held scotopic lenses that allowed her to see in the dark and when she saw what was in the cavern, a smile spread slowly across her fine-boned features. Like the Cheshire Cat she vanished down into the shadows, grinning with strong, white teeth.

Bruce Wayne thumbed the remote control. He'd had enough of the Johnny Carson Show. Not even Superman's guest appearance could hold his attention. He wondered why his friend agreed to these chat shows and how he managed to maintain his good humour even after the old joke about wearing his underpants on the outside had trotted out for the thousandth time. The TV went dead and Wayne stared into space. When space became boring, he decided to call his butler.

At precisely that moment, Alfred Pennyworth, tall, thin and immaculately dressed, opened the door.

"Master Bruce..." he began.

Wayne turned around, startled. "Alfred!" he said. "Don't tell me you've added telepathy to your list of accomplishments? I was just going to give you a call. Fancy a game of chess?"

Alfred looked uneasy. "I'm afraid I shall have to decline, Master Bruce. I just popped in to let you know that the intruder alarm has been activated."

Wayne leapt up, with an athlete's economy of movement.

"Where?" He said, making for the door.

"In the Batcave, sir. The Trophy Room..."

"Will you be requiring any assistance, sir?" Alfred called after him.

"I'll let you know."

Wayne disappeared round a corner. Alfred sighed, tidied the cushions on the sofa, and unplugged the TV set.

So there would be no noise, he went down by the stairs behind the grandfather clock instead of using the elevator. The lights threw his shadow ahead of him, casting a monstrous black bat shape on the whitewashed walls. He ran lightly through the computer vault of the Batcave and when he reached the Trophy Room he flipped a switch, activating banks of floodlights. In the sudden harsh brightness, nothing moved.

"Whoever you are, you're in deep trouble," said The Batman and his voice was as deadly as and as cold as December rain. "Come out!"

Nothing moved.

The Batman surveyed the Trophy Room with eyes as hard as diamond shards. This was the most impressive part of the Batcave; an enormous lime-stoned cavern, as big as a cathedral. Down here were stored all souvenirs of The Batman's bizarre cases. There was a life-size mechanical Tyrannosaur from Dinosaur Island. There was a chess game with pawns as tall as men and a penny as big as a ferris wheel. An enormous, eerily lit Joker mask leered down upon a giant dice shaker and a glass cabinet with a bat costume inside. There was an Egyptian sarcophagus and several dangerous umbrellas. There was a very tall penguin and a perfectly normal sized dollar bill. There were over a thousand trophies, free-standing or in cases, utterly strange or quite

conventional. There were all these things and one thing more...

"Come out!" The Batman said again. He tilted his head and sniffed. On the edge of the slightly damp, subterranean smell of the cavern he could detect another scent. He sniffed again and suddenly knew who was here with him. He knew and was on his guard.

The woman with green eyes watched him move among the trophies and prepared to strike. She ran the thongs of a whip through her gloved fingers and waited for him to come closer, smiling all the while.

The Batman stopped in front of a shattered case and if he knew before, then this was his final confirm-ation of the intruder's identity. He turned, with her

name on his lips and something came whistling

through the air towards him.

"Catwoman..." He ducked and the whip smashed

what remained of the glass in the cabinet.

"Fancy meeting you here," said the Catwoman.

She cast a critical eye around the cavern. "Wouldn't

stamp collecting take up a little less room?"

"How did you get in here?" The Batman asked,

standing up, eyeing her warily. He knew better than to

underestimate her. She cracked the whip once more,

like a lion tamer.

"Oh, I just thought I'd set up operations again in

Gotham," she told him. "I came down searching for a

new location for my Catacomb lair. Lucky for me. A catas-

trophe for you."

"Remind me to block up the hole after I've taken you

back to prison," said The Batman.

She only smiled wickedly. "Oh, I wouldn't worry about that. Once I discover exactly where under the city we are, I'll know where to find your front door next time. And so will everybody else. Your secret will be out."

"But you won't find out!" The Batman said, allowing himself one icy smile to match hers. "You might have done if you hadn't given yourself away. I smelled your perfume as soon as I came down here."

He started to advance. "And then when I saw that case, I was sure."

She backed off. "I was merely reclaiming what was mine. Like a closer look?"

Suddenly the whip snaked out, lashing across Batman's face. He pitched back, briefly blinded by

razor-edged pain.

"What's a bat but a flying mouse after all?" he heard her say. "Let's play a cat and mouse." Her voice grew fainter as she darted away. The Batman shook his head to clear his vision. Blinking through bruised eyelids, he heard, nearby, the sound of a ratchet being pulled back.

"I see everything's in perfect working order," Cat-woman hissed. "Purr-fect working order..."

There was a sharp detonation. The Batman. hit the floor. Something heavy had whined past his ear and clipped a strip out of his cape. He did not have to see to know she had used the harpoon cannon. There was a splintering thud as the harpoon smashed through the side of a doll's house. The Batman rolled into cover and looked out through the stinging,

tea-filled eyes. He was on the chessboard but Cat-

woman was nowhere to be seen.

She came from behind.

The Batman whirled too late to stop the toppling

chess piece from pinning his legs.

"Checkmate!" shrieked the Catwoman.

Hefting the huge rook off his legs, Batman groggily

pulled himself to his feet. One ankle throbbed like a

bad tooth. He scanned the Trophy Room for signs of

his enemy. When he spotted her, his mouth corru-

gated into a grimace. She was running up the steep

spine of the Tyrannosaur, as surely as a tabby on a

fence. When she reached the shoulders, she pullled

back the hatch that led into the head of the dinosaur

and stepped inside.

The Batman ran, ignoring his pains that thumped

through his leg. He ran, while the Trophy Room

echoed to the noise of the machinery starting to move.

With a grinding shudder, the monster's tail twitched.

It twitched twice more and then it swung into a flailing

arc and demolished a helicopter.

"What a wonderful place you have here!"

Catwoman's voice came through the loudspeaker in

the Tyrannosaur's mouth. "Much more fun than

Disneyland!"

The monster lurched and began to move. Its tail

thrashed through the row of display cases which burst

like bombs showering The Batman with glass.

"This whole night's been one long catalogue of

disasters for you, Batman dear," mocked the monster,

with Catwoman's voice. His mind racing, Batman ran

under the dinosaur, out of her sight. In that

comparative safety he reviewed his situation. He had been taken by surprise. He was injured and things looked bad. His only hope lay in turning Catwoman's own nature against her. Unclipping the radio from his belt, he signaled Alfred.

"Where are you?" purred his enemy. "Come out, come out, the game's not over

The tail shuddered once more, then the dinosaur stopped. The hatch opened and Catwoman jumped down, landing on her feet. "Batman..." Her voice was a lethal whisper and she moved like a hunting cat, flexing the claws on her gloves. "Where are you?"

But he had gone, melted into thin air like a man of grey vapour. She drew her lips back over her teeth and paddled off in search of him. She searched the lab and garage; she searched the storeroom

and she searched the computer vault.

And that was where she found the stairs. At the top of those stairs would be the key to The Batman's secret identity. She could wipe out his entire operation at a stroke. Or could it be a trap. Perhaps she should escape now and return at her leisure.

She looked back at the caves and she looked up the stairs and finally, overcome by the need to know, she ran up the steps, purring. With the contented expression of a cat that has gorged itself on cream, she opened the door in the grandfather clock.

And Alfred, waiting there, spritzed her in the face with gas. The satisfaction changed to surprise and then to rage until at last her face went blank and Catwoman keeled over like a doll. Batman caught her.

"Everything all right, sir?" asked Alfred.

"Fine, Alfred," Replied The Batman. "Just fine."

When she woke up she was in the Batmobile, in downtown Gotham and headed for Police Headquarters.

"Tough luck, Selina," The Batman consoled her.

"Maybe next time." Catwoman simply snarled.

"I knew you'd try the stairs," he went on. "You just couldn't resist it. I suppose it proves what they say..."

She glared at him with eyes as green as gemstones.

"I know. I know," she spat. "It's not funny."

The Batman smiled, pulling into the Police parking lot. "Oh, I think it is," He said. "Just like in the old story: Curiosity Killed the Cat."